Trial between Christians

For the past several years, the question of whether or not to file lawsuits among the teaching staff (pastors) in my denomination has been raised. There have been various opinions expressed, but the denomination seems to be moving in the direction of encouraging people to avoid filing lawsuits as much as possible and forbidding people from encouraging or facilitating lawsuits.

Just a few weeks ago, however, I received a letter from a teaching staff member who is filing a lawsuit, asserting his position. I imagine that the same letter was probably sent to many of our teaching colleagues.

Also enclosed with the letter were the written opinions of two defense attorneys. At least one of them appeared to be a Christian lawyer. The attorneys, of course, argued that the pastor also had the right to sue. Although their views did not necessarily read exactly the same, they both discussed the Old Testament right to sue and actual cases, and said that the Bible also recognizes the right to sue. They warn that taking away this right violates the Constitution of Japan.

However, I am not convinced by the opinions of these lawyers. This is because both lawyers speak only from the teachings and examples of the Old Testament, and never mention the teachings of Christ or the Apostle Paul as recorded in the New Testament. Also, I feel that the lawyers only consider the teaching (pastor) lawsuit from the aspect of human rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and do not consider it as an issue of Christian faith.

Therefore, as a pastor, not a lawyer, I would like to summarize my views briefly and express my faith position to the readers. This is because I believe that some readers will find the teachings of Christ and Paul superior to and more important than the provisions and teachings of the Old Testament, or they will agree with what I say.

1. The Bible recognizes jurisdiction.

This is what your two lawyers have also said. In particular, the Old Testament uses the famous principle of impartiality, "an eye for an eye," as the basis for judgment. (The eye for an eye law does not encourage vengeance, but teaches fair judgment.) It is possible that the Old Testament was, in a sense, very much ahead of its time, since it recognized the jurisdiction of all Israelites, and of those who sojourned in Israel. However, since it was a law given by God, it was only natural.

Therefore, even Christians have the right to demand a fair trial or to appeal to a court of law. This is evident both by Old Testament principles and by Paul's appeal to Caesar. However, it must be understood that Paul did not voluntarily seek a trial, but was accused of being innocent and was forced to appeal. We must also know that this was a special arrangement of God so that the gospel revealed to Paul would reach Rome, the center of the world at that time.

Christ has given us a higher principle.

Christ, however, taught those who would follow Him to live by higher principles, not to remain with the teachings of the Old Testament. This is a point, as I pointed out earlier, that neither of the two lawyers mentioned at all. While Christians recognize and accept the Old Testament law as a principle, they live by the higher ethical code of Christ.

Christ said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not be at the mercy of evil things. Do not be on the wrong side of the wicked one. To him who strikes you on your right cheek, turn also your left cheek," and He taught, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, '□□□□□ But I say to you," He repeated and repeated His words. While Christ recognized the authority of the Old Testament and the validity of its laws, He also set forth a higher ethic for those who followed Him. (Matthew 5:21-48, New Testament) Please read this part of the Bible.

Specifically, Christians are to live by the ethic of forgiveness, not by the ethic of "an eye for an eye" or the ethic of impartial judgment by trial. As ordinary Jews, or as ordinary human beings, we had the right to demand a fair trial for those we charged with trying to take our underwear. That is a right. But what

Christ taught those who would follow Him was not to exercise that right, to live a life of renunciation. He taught us to go with those who would compel us to go one million, but to go two million with them.

The higher ethic given to those who seek to follow Christ, the ethic that He demands of those who wish to follow Him, is not to claim one's rights, but to give up one's rights. Christ repeatedly teaches, in different words and different phrases, that what is required of those who wish to follow Him is self-abandonment. If you are a teacher (pastor), you must know the words, "If anyone wishes to follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. You also know that Christ repeats the same meaning over and over again. It is a natural part of our basic human rights to assert and defend our rights. However, Christ has shown us a higher "ethics of Christ. We must know that a life that demands one's own rights is at odds with a life that follows Christ.

3. Paul's Teaching

Paul is very saddened by the fact that believers are suing each other in the church in Corinth, and he strictly warns them against it. (New Testament Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 6, verses 1-8) Normally, I would like to quote this entire section of the Bible, but it would be too long, so I will omit it. However, if you have a Bible, I encourage you to read this section again and check it out.

What Paul is saying here is (1) that disputes within the church should be judged righteously within the church, not by an outside tribunal, and (2) that suing each other is already a defeat in the first place. Paul, as a distinguished scholar of the Pharisees, was well versed in the Old Testament law. He knew that Christians also had the right to appeal to the court. Paul then asked, "Why do you not rather take the injustice in stride? Why are you not rather being deceived?" He is scolding the congregation in Corinth for their low spiritual level. Paul was reminded of the high ethical principles of Christ. He was speaking to the church, not to ordinary Jews or unbelieving Gentiles.

Paul was not appealing to the "rights" taught by the Old Testament, but to the higher ethic of "renunciation of rights" taught by Christ. For the church is a community of people who want to follow and imitate Christ. The two lawyers'

view does not even mention this Paul's saying at all. They seem to be completely unaware of the distinction or difference between the general principles of the Old Testament and the higher ethics to which those who follow Christ should aspire.

We Christians are to understand and accept the principles of the Old Testament law, but live by the higher principles of Christ. This is what Paul means when he says, "Be willing to suffer injustice, but be deceived. Be deceived.

We are to live by the principle of "he who strikes you on the right cheek will also strike you on the left cheek" taught by Christ, and the principle of "do not sue" taught by Paul, and we are to instruct our congregations to do the same.

There is an argument that if we do that, injustice will infest the world. Injustice infests everywhere. Paul's concern, and Christ's importance, was not that the world would not be infested with injustice in a just trial, but that those who seek to follow Christ would not fight one another for their rights. To this end, Paul inserted his famous teaching on "the humility of Christ" in the New Testament letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 4-9, to provide the ultimate example of the surrender of rights to which we should aspire. Humility and forgiving one another as God has forgiven us is the way we should live in this friction-filled world.

4. Is the rule of not appealing to the court against the Constitution of Japan?

I am not a lawyer, so I do not think I can participate in the discussion of whether or not a faith-based rule not to sue in court violates the "fundamental human rights" set forth in the Constitution of Japan. However, I would like to make it clear that this is a matter of faith, a matter of the way one's faith should be. The way of faith, standing on the Bible, prohibits us from suing.

There are many unwritten, though not codified, rules in our denomination. Teaching personnel must not repeatedly divorce and remarry. Teachers must not have concubines. Teachers must not engage in the pornography business. Teachers must not engage in the sale of alcoholic beverages. Teachers must not

engage in gambling for a living. I am sure there are many more. All of these are common sense that apply the teachings of the Bible to us, the teaching profession (pastors). But all of these things are guaranteed by the current Japanese Constitution and are allowed as a matter of personal freedom and basic human rights.

Are we prohibited from doing what is allowed by Japanese law? No, we are not. This is only a matter of our faith to follow the teachings of Christ and the Bible, and the Constitution permits such things as "religious freedom.

I would like to ask the teaching staff and the two lawyers who claim that even the teaching staff (pastors) can be taken to court, can our denomination not discharge or dismiss a pastor who is drunk, goofing off and causing trouble in the neighborhood? If a pastor has had three concubines, can he not be dismissed from his position because having concubines is included in "personal freedom" that cannot be punished under Japanese law? Whether or not to take the matter to court is not a legal issue, or a matter of human rights guaranteed by the Constitution, but a matter of a very important principle in our faith, the principle of forgiveness.

5. a matter of faith

What we are dealing with now is a matter of faith. If we do that, we will lose. If it is said that there are bad laymen in the church, or bad pastors, or people who cheat, deceive, and make money from the congregation, it must be said that this is exactly true. It is embarrassing to say the least, but such pastors can be found everywhere these days.

But were there no such people in Paul's time? Were there no such dawdlers in the time of Christ? I think there were many more of them in Christ's time than today. In such a situation, Christ teaches us to give a coat to those who try to take our underwear, and Paul encourages us to be deceived.

It is not Christian to pretend to be righteous. It is the Christian who forgives with the joy of forgiveness. It is the Christian who abandons the image of God, takes on the form of a lowly man, and seeks to follow in the footsteps of Christ,

who persevered in obedience to the cross and ultimately gave up self. It is the church that encourages each other to be like Christ, even though we can never fully be like Him. It is the teaching profession that tries to set an example.

We should take another look at the magnitude of the fact that our sins are forgiven. Because of the magnitude of that wonderful gift, its value, and its immense riches, we are able to forsake the riches and honors of this world. Even if we are sued and lose the case and lose face, we can go on without being discouraged because of the brightness of the crown of life. To sue one another, brothers and sisters, is to grieve the Lord who loved us and saved us, even to the point of forfeiting our lives. The Lord loves both the sister who wants to sue and the brother who is about to be sued, and He sacrificed for them.

If we make an agreement of faith that such an attitude of forgiveness is to be lived out in the Christian community, and then lose in court because it violates the Constitution of Japan or the Civil Code, we should just keep quiet and lose. That is the attitude that Christians should adopt. At the very least, that is the position of my faith. But how can Christians, who do not sue to resolve their problems, violate the Constitution when they practice the faith of Christ's teachings, the faith of Paul's teachings? Wouldn't that be a violation of religious freedom? Experience and Christian Faith

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Christian faith is based on experience. I am likely to be scolded by many advocates of "biblical faith" when I say this, but according to the "Bible," Christian faith is based on the "experience" of having met Jesus. Even after Jesus returned to heaven, the experience of meeting the risen Jesus was the starting point of each believer's faith, and the content of their testimony, which they continued to share wherever they went. The "biblical faith by understanding," which many Protestant churches hold up as correctly understanding the teachings of the Bible, agreeing with them, accepting them, and believing in them, is, to say the least, something that is not found in the Bible.

Our position of faith, known as Pentecostal faith, also originates from the faith experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. So our theology is a theology that places great emphasis on experience. And I don't think that is wrong. All theology, in one way or another, is born out of experience. Nevertheless, the important thing here is that even if we value experience very highly, we must not be carried away by it. The experiences that we always come back to as the important starting point of our own faith, the experiences that we advocate as an important part of our theology, must have precedents in the Bible that we can emulate. The same experiences as our own must be clearly described in the Bible, not as mere examples, but in a way that can serve as a norm and a model.

For example, the baptism of the Holy Spirit with tongues is clearly described in Acts, which Luke seems to have written with clear theological intent and under the supervision of his teacher Paul. Especially important are the accounts in chapters 10 and 11 of Cornelio's reception of the Spirit and the disciples' discussion. There we find (1) that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles on the day of Pentecost, just as it was given to the disciples. (2) That Peter made this judgment because they spoke in tongues. (3) It is written so clearly that it is indisputable that Peter's judgment was also the common judgment of the disciples at that time.

There are those among us who claim that they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit but did not speak in tongues. It is true that there are many sincere Christian experiences that do not involve tongues. However, in order to call it the baptism of the Holy Spirit, one must first prove with biblical examples that there is such a thing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit without tongues. In order to make the individual Christian experience an important part of one's faith and to encourage others to do the same, there must be examples in the Bible, the kind of examples that should serve as models and norms for future generations of Christians.

What about the phenomenon of falling away that is so common among us? Something similar is described in the Bible. But the Bible gives it no importance. Nor does it teach that it should or should not fall. Therefore, it is wrong to

promote such things or to make falling over as an important experience of one's faith. We hear stories here and there of "miracles" such as gold dust falling or gold teeth growing in. However, these are events that are not mentioned in the Bible at all. That, too, cannot be an important part of our faith.

We also hear about the distribution of apostolic gifts through the laying on of hands, the practice of prophecy, the breaking of the influence of our ancestors' evil deeds through prayer, and many other things that are being done today. We need to carefully read the Bible to see if these are the true Christian experiences described in the Bible. We testify of our experiences of encountering Christ. It is a faith that values experience. However, it must be an experiential faith that is backed up by the Bible.

Let me give you an example. The apostle Paul had a wonderful God experience or Holy Spirit experience that he called "the third heaven. According to Paul's description, it was a wonderful experience. However, he does not recommend it to others. He is only bringing it up as something that he experienced. On the other hand, he recommends speaking in tongues as if it were an essential experience for almost all Christians. He encourages all Christians to speak in tongues as if it were an essential experience for almost all Christians, and he claims to be able to speak more than anyone else, and he speaks highly of the experience. What we can say there is that we understand that it is not right to seek or recommend the experience of the "third heaven" in general, and that it should be stopped only as the experience of Paul, the great apostle. But the experience of speaking in tongues is an experience that should be taught and recommended to all Christians.